

Removing physical barriers to Cyprus reunification

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Antigoni Kallouri and Necmi Marauna were among those Cypriot farmers, on both sides of the island, who for many years could not access their lands. The presence of landmines in the buffer zone between the northern and southern part of Cyprus made cultivating local farmlands too dangerous

“A few years back, there was an accident in the field next to ours. A farmer drove his tractor on one of the mines,” recalls Antigoni.

Today, however, 81 minefields have been declared mine free. “I have regained my land back,” she said. “Since my total number of arable land has increased, so will our income.” For decades, mines have prevented the rehabilitation of many areas in and around the buffer zone, on both sides of the island. They have also delayed the opening of new crossing points and served as a constant reminder of past conflict, hindering reconciliation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities.

Since 2004, the UNDP Partnership for the Future Programme in Cyprus (UNDP-PFF), in partnership with the European Union, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) has worked with the two communities to reduce the number of landmines on the island and normalize conditions in the buffer zone.

At the launch of the project, 101 minefields were identified – 53 outside the buffer zone and 48 inside. Among them 5,000 anti-tank mines and 15,000 anti-personnel mines were found.

UNDP de-miners helped to clear these minefields, as well as other suspect areas such as booby-trapped buildings. During excavations they also provided support to the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP), and helped UNFICYP mark new suspect areas and provide Mine Risk Education (MRE) to UN Peacekeepers.

As a result of these efforts, over 27,000 landmines have been removed from the buffer zone in the past 7 years. Gradually, 1,571,206 square metres of land is being returned to the people.

The mine clearance project has also led to a powerful confidence-building measure in Cyprus and provided a platform for further bi-communal projects.

The people of Cyprus can now enjoy new social and economic opportunities. They look forward to a future free from the dangers of hidden mines and unexploded ordnance. However, much more needs to be done, as there are still an estimated 15,000 landmines on the island. (SG report 2011/332)

“Now that we are assured that our land is completely mine-free, we definitely plan on using it to grow cucumbers, tomatoes and strawberries, but our deepest fear is that not all landmine are gone,” said Necmi.

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Highlights:

- 27,000 land mines removed from the Buffer Zone
- 81 minefields declared mine-free
- 1,571,206 square metres of land returned to its original use
- 15,000 mines still remaining on the island

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